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PRESS RELEASE

ICLMG and la Ligue des droits et libertés call for robust oversight and revision of powers granted to Canadian Security Establishment Canada

(Ottawa/Montréal) – Ten years after the creation of the Arar Commission by the Paul Martin government in February 2004, very little has changed. In the midst of the present debate about the spying activities of the Canadian Security Establishment Canada (CSEC), the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) and la Ligue des droits et libertés are calling on parliamentarians to re-visit Justice O’Connor’s recommendations aimed at overseeing and increasing the transparency of the surveillance and information sharing practices of Canadian intelligence gathering agencies.

The Commission, set up to shed light on the actions of Canadian officials that led to the rendition and torture of Maher Arar in Syria, was also mandated to propose an oversight mechanism for the national security operations of the RCMP. Based on its findings, the Commission concluded that it was insufficient to propose a ‘watchdog’ model only for the RCMP because national security investigations and activities were carried out in an integrated manner involving narrow collaboration amongst various police and intelligence agencies, including CSEC. To address this reality, the Commission proposed an integrated and robust oversight mechanism with powers to receive complaints, to investigate and to carry out reviews of the activities of a dozen federal agencies, including CSEC.

The model proposed by Justice O’Connor was received favourably by the group of interveners at the Commission, including ICLMG and la Ligue des droits et libertés. Furthermore, in December 2009, a majority vote in the House of Commons supported a motion calling on the government to implement the Commission’s recommendations, including the creation of a new system of checks and balances for the agencies tasked

with national security investigations.

“ Ten years later, it is astonishing that the present debate surrounding the oversight of CSEC’s activities, in Parliament and in the media, by and large ignores the model proposed by Justice O’Connor”, says Roch Tassé, National co-ordinator of ICLMG. “Instead of getting bogged down in endless debates and re-inventing the wheel, why not re-visit the solutions proposed by the Commission at a cost of some \$10 million dollars to tax payers? ”

As well, ICLMG and la Ligue are worried by the fact that the present debate seems to focus solely on a narrow vision of the legality of CSEC’s activities. The two organizations call instead for a fundamental review, by Parliament, of the entire surveillance regime and excessive and disproportionate powers granted to CSEC in the *Anti-Terrorism Act* adopted in a hurry in December 2001. “ In light of the recent revelations about CSEC’s spying activities, it is urgent that Parliament review the mandate of that agency and amend the legislation to ensure that the powers granted to CSEC are reined in and respect the rights of Canadians, including the right to privacy ”, says Dominique Peschard, President of la Ligue des droits et libertés. In this regard, the demands of ICLMG and la Ligue are consistent with the recommendations contained in a special report tabled last week in Parliament by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

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